

# Schoolchildren are drawn to the pride of lions on The Meadows

A bunch of eight and nine-year-olds from George Heriot's School were having fun this week examining the pride of bronze lions which have taken up residence, and learning to draw them with Scottish artist Jane Lee McCracken.

The 25 bronze lions are ranged around the grass at the main junction on the north side of The Meadows forming a free outdoor exhibition and bringing the plight of the world's lions to universal attention. Studies have predicted that lions could be extinct in 30 years as numbers now have dropped by 90% since 1960.

Born Free Forever has been created on behalf of the international wildlife charity Born Free by Australian artists Gillie and Marc and each sculpture represents a real-life lion with its own unique story.

The centrepiece is Elsa the lioness on top of a 4X4 which featured in the 1966 film Born Free starring the charity founders Virginia McKenna OBE and her late husband Bill Travers MBE.



Born Free have installed a pride of lions in the Meadows. Edinburgh-born Jane, who is the Founder and CEO of *Drawing for the Planet*, believes that the exhibition brings a vital message about the future of the species to the people of Scotland.

Jane Lee McCracken said: "I am beyond thrilled that the Born Free Forever exhibition will be displayed in my hometown, Edinburgh. It is an honour to partner with Born Free to deliver a Biro drawing workshop to George Heriot's schoolchildren and provide them with the opportunity to draw the stunning bronze lions. This breath-taking exhibition is vital to raising awareness of the plight of lions and encouraging the protection of this majestic, keystone species for future generations. A world without lions is simply unimaginable."



Jane Lee McCracken Founder and CEO of *Drawing for the Planet Born Free* introduces the budding young artists to best practice in drawing lions. PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter



Two of the children from George Heriot's School at the Born

Free installation in the Meadows. PHOTO © 2022 The Edinburgh Reporter



Born Free have installed a pride of lions in the Meadows. These pupils from George Heriot's School really enjoyed themselves learning how to draw lions. PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter



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<https://twitter.com/BornFreeFDN/status/1578298727336497152?s=20&t=hs2K-AFjKyIG2HKMBh1Pug>

When the film *Born Free* was made in 1960s, there were around 200,000 lions in the wild across Africa. There are now only 20,000 remaining, a devastating decline which, if not halted, could see them becoming extinct across much of their wild range within 30 years.

The free exhibition which is part of a year of action for Born Free in the year when Bill Travers would have been 100. It will remain in place in The Meadows for three months and three lion statues will also be sited in St Andrew Square in a partnership with Essential Edinburgh.

Virginia McKenna OBE, Co-Founder & Trustee, Born Free, said "I am overjoyed to be bringing our beautiful lion exhibition, Born Free Forever, to Scotland, a country which has a special place in my heart as it was where, in 1969, my late husband Bill and I worked together on bringing Gavin Maxwell's magical story, 'Ring of Bright Water' to the big

screen.

“I have been back many times, most recently in the summer of 2021. Tragically, since that time, wild lion numbers have declined catastrophically – and Born Free is determined to do something about it! That is why I urge everyone who can to please visit this incredible exhibition and discover why this magnificent pride of lions means so much to Born Free. Each one has its own unique and powerful true story.

“Through those individual stories, visitors will learn about the plight of lions in captivity, the challenges they face in the wild – where they belong – and what we can all do to help. I’m so thrilled that Edinburgh is hosting this stunning exhibition and I hope people of all ages will come to share the experience and become part of our Born Free Family.”

Will Travers OBE, Executive President & Co-Founder, Born Free, said: “Lions are confronted by many challenges, persecuted in the wild and exploited in captivity. We simply cannot ignore their individual suffering and declining numbers for a moment longer. This life-size, outdoor, bronze sculpture exhibition, created by monumental artists Gillie and Marc, and featuring iconic lions, including Elsa on top of a 4×4, champions lions and tells some of their stories. I encourage everyone to visit Born Free Forever in Edinburgh, not only to marvel at the exhibition and learn more about these emblematic and majestic creatures, but to help us raise funds and campaign so that there is a forever for lions.”

Gillie and Marc, who created the sculptures, said: “The bronze cubs symbolise the future generations of lions that can be created with hard work, dedication and a lot of love. The lion is a big part of our national identity and personifies the qualities of what it is to be British; strength, courage and pride. If wild lions were to become extinct, we would lose part of ourselves.”



Born Free have installed a pride of lions in the Meadows. This is one interpretation of what it looks like. PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter



Orla, a pupil from George Heriot's School shows off her

drawing. Born Free have installed a pride of lions in the Meadows.